

Louis Lorenzo Jr. has been selected as the 2016 San Carlos Apache Region First Things First Champion for Young Children.

The award is given to local champions who actively volunteer their time to raise public awareness of the importance of early childhood development and health. Champions spend a significant amount of time volunteering with FTF and building public awareness about the importance of early childhood issues.



Lorenzo engaged in awareness-raising efforts such as:

- Consistently sharing the message that Apache children ages birth to 5 deserve a healthy mental, emotional and physical development on the San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation.
- Learning more on adverse childhood experiences and talking with community members on how children born into unhealthy and broken homes will continue to strain the Tribal healthcare system and cause devastation to the Tribe.
- Engaging Apache elders and spiritual leaders on the importance of early childhood development and its positive effects.

We recently caught up with Lorenzo, who works as Bylas Prevention Coordinator with the San Carlos Wellness Center.

Question: Why do you feel early childhood development and health is so important?

Answer: Every Apache child from birth to age 5 deserves healthy mental, emotional and physical development on the San Carlos Apache Reservation. The healthier our children, the healthier our Tribe will be in the future.

Q: What caused you to get involved in efforts to increase public awareness in early childhood issues?

A: In the last 20 years, I've seen an increase in adult diabetes and substance abuse issues among our youth which leads to depression, suicidal ideation and a dependency on prescription medication. It's a strain on our Tribal healthcare system. Children born into unhealthy homes become part of the broken society which is devastating for our Tribe and communities.

Q: Why do you feel building awareness in early childhood and developmental health is so important for families and communities?

A: Apache parents, tribal leaders, health agencies and community leaders need to understand it is much easier to build strong, healthy children than to fix broken adults and broken families. When it comes to our Tribe's number one natural resources (our children) we have to think and work strategically, progressively, proactively and always think investment (in our children).

Q: How have you seen awareness for the early years change in your community?

A: Strategically, it hasn't changed much. We are using the same plans (if any) and expecting different results. We have to look at different ways to invest in our children if we are to survive as a Tribe and a people.

Q: How do you suggest other people in your community get involved?

A: Engaging and educating young parents and grandparents about the importance of early childhood development and its positive effects on the child are essential to building and empowering the community. The more you reach out to parents the more trust you will build with them. The Tribe as a whole has to think long term investment in our children from birth to 18 years of age.